

Grounded
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As an alcoholic and addict, my life depends on making healthy choices and participating in activities that support my well-being. Writing a daily three-page letter to a Higher Power and reading it to a sponsor is one of the disciplines I practice. The writing gives me a safe space to constructively explore and see what is blocking me from living life fully. Upon entering graduate school, although initially resistant and fearful, I made the decision to completely engage in Tim Ingold's theory of *Thinking through Making* and the Surrealist's technique of automatism to begin a whole new way of working. This new creative process required that I play, be present, and let go of preconceived ideas and outcomes. During the fabrication of this work, I realized that *Thinking through Making* and automatism are directly related to the daily writing as well as the principles I am learning to live by in a 12-Step program. As I walked through fears and made new exciting discoveries through making, I became certain that the writing had opened me up to accept this new way of working more readily.

Writing, coupled with a new approach to making led to a transformation in the artwork and in me. The result of that radical shift in methodologies was the creation of a sculptural installation made by hand through experiments with handmade paper, crochet, knitting, netting, and stitching with materials found or discarded from nature, the trash or from second-hand sources. The unanticipated product of this new way of working was the creation of an environment that afforded me the opportunity to reflect on the grace and good fortune that has moved me into a life where I am grounded and aware of the beauty that surrounds me.

Grounded

A Thesis

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Tim Ingold, a contemporary British anthropologist, presents his theory, *Thinking through Making* to other anthropologists as an advocacy for a healthier way of being in and interacting with the world in response to the problem of unsustainable results derived by technoscientifically driven policies. He is arguing against the current reliance on engineered experiments and scientific procedures that are placing the knowledge seeker ‘outside’ of the world desired to be known. The ‘outside’ view or *Making through Thinking* relies on hypotheses generated from one’s head about theories or facts with a followed experiment in a lab or field where one tests against the facts to then revise the ideas to be in alignment with the findings (Ingold, 00:12:23-00:12:52). “By wrapping things up in our own preconceptions and categorical frameworks” Ingold states that we “cut knowing off from the immediacy of our own visceral sensory engagement with the world of our everyday lives...leaving no room for growth” (Ingold, 00:15:52-00:16:23). Ingold, by his definition of sustainability, is advocating that we be able to carry life on. *Thinking through Making* presents a solution, a way of knowing from the ‘inside’, in which artists have already been participating, where “knowledge grows from the crucible of our own practical observational engagements with the materials, beings, and things all around us in the very processes of thought” (Ingold, 00:14:03-00:14:18). Knowledge, in this manner, expands as one’s life unfolds.

Until recently, I thought the act of painting and drawing meant accurately and with precision capturing the subject before me through the means of ink, paint and/or pencil. I was trained to work from observation—to begin with the subject at hand and end with that subject rendered successfully on the page. I initiated projects with an idea and would bring that idea to fruition. Most people believe that a maker has an idea in their mind and then imposes it on a medium in the same way I was working. Ingold argues against an “artifact [being] a materialization of a thought” and questions “Where is the creativity of this?” (Ingold, 00:00:54-00:00:58, 00:2:53-00:2:55). When we are required to look backward to an idea that was unprecedented in the mind of the maker that gave rise to an object, we are assuming that creativity is rooted in innovation. The idea of creativity being in the novel idea, eliminates the creativity found in the process. Ingold instead states our need to “read creativity forwards” (Ingold, 00:4:45-

004:48). In reading creativity forward, we improvise and find our way, “joining with the movements of materials and awareness as [we] feel [our] way ahead in real time” (Ingold, 00:05:03-00:05:13). Ann Hamilton, installation artist and weaver of multidisciplinary materials, states “When I am working, so much is intuitive. All of my antennae are there all the time, reading the news, feeling the atmosphere, sensing changes, and all work is made from the time it is in” (Booker).

There is a long history of artists working in this way. In my first year of graduate school, I adopted one of the methods from this history. Stepping away from the certainty I experienced with drawing a specified subject and gaining a specified result, I took a prompt using automatic drawing to solve a problem. The result of this risk were surprises and revelations that spurred me into asking new questions, using new media, ultimately shifting the way I think about making.

The method introduced to me is called Automatic Drawing or Automatism. In this technique, one allows the hand to move over the page without conscious regulation, drawing without editing. This form of drawing and spontaneous creativity began with the Surrealists. Surrealism began in France with the poet Andre Breton in 1924. Breton, who had studied medicine, psychiatry, and the works of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, was curious about the unconscious mind as the source of the artist’s creativity and wanted to “resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality” (Chivers, 612). Surrealism in this way piggybacks on the methodologies of the Dada artists, who created art and performed as a reaction to the realities and devastations of WWI.

The Surrealists challenged the boundaries created by Rationalism and the Individualism of the Enlightenment movement by investigating the workings of the unconscious and irrational mind through literary and artistic methods. The Rationalists believed “the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive...[with a confidence that] proof and physical evidence are unnecessary to ascertain truth” (Markie). William James, philosopher, psychologist, and educator critiqued the “shallowness of Rationalist philosophizing” much like the Dadaist and Surrealists, as the principles of traditional art proved to them to be absurd in the face of the madness and chaos of war (James). He expressed that “Rationalism makes systems,” when “the actual universe is a thing wide open” (James).

The wide-open universe that is explored by James, the Dadaist, and the Surrealists, mirrors Ingold's idea of the meshwork in *Thinking through Making*.

In *Thinking through Making* we participate in the “meshwork,” where there is growth and progression as opposed to a network, or structured plan with limitations on growth and ingenuity. Ingold illustrates the meshwork as a group of strings and knots with threads moving in different directions, dangling, interweaving amongst each other, allowing loose ends to fall about. The loose ends are available to pick up and follow on to the next idea and the next, continuing creativity and imagination.

The Surrealists challenged the traditional arts, much like Ingold is challenging the idea of the ‘network’ or James challenging the ‘system,’ by practicing automatism. This technique was used to engage the unconscious mind and “[reveal] the source of inspiration and original invention in the human mind...to make truly creative production available to everyone, a first step in the Surrealist transformation of the world” (Cramer and Ghant). This way of working engages the ‘meshwork,’ as the Surrealists are opening up to the unconscious mind with intentions to reveal the hidden, repressed parts of the psyche. In this way, artists are able to pick up the newly found thread and follow it to the next idea.

According to Freud, creator of the psychoanalytic theory, we are unaware of the unconscious mind that occurs within us automatically causing uncontrollable effects on our behavior. The unconscious, according to Freud is “[comprised of] the memories and mental processes of very early childhood, which have been repressed or abandoned in later life, but which still retain their power of indirectly influencing consciousness by transferring the energy at their disposal to analogous ideas repressed from the preconscious, thus making these also unconscious” (Brown). Techniques such as free association, or a speaking or writing without censorship were used to reveal parts of the unconscious mind.

Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and colleague of Freud agreed that one's personality is determined by the unconscious. He believed in the importance of practicing awareness and facing the reality of our psyche, our world within. He did not strive for the idea of moral perfection. He believed that seeking perfection hindered one's development and fueled one's dark side. Instead, Jung aimed at

completeness. He dedicated a majority of his work to the idea of completeness or the wholeness of the personality, what he called individuation. Individuation is an intentional and disciplined practice to create awareness of the unconscious mind, its symbols and archetypes. Jung found that this work, not only developed the inner psyche, it created a connectivity to others as one is able to identify these symbols and archetypes common for all people and develop a deep knowing that we are not alone. The first step of a conscious path of individuation is to rid oneself of the persona, the social mask one wears to fit in the social world. A block to the deeper exploration of the psyche occurs when one believes that one's true personality is the social mask or persona (Jung, 65-67). According to Jung:

One cannot individuate as long as one is playing a role to oneself; the convictions one has about oneself are the most subtle form of persona and the most subtle obstacle against any true individuation. One can admit practically anything, yet somewhere one retains the idea that one is never the so and so, and this is always a sort of final argument which counts apparently as a plus; yet it functions as an influence against true individuation. It is a most painful procedure to tear off those veils, but each step forward in psychological development means just that, the tearing off of a new veil. We are like onions with many skins, and we have to peel ourselves again and again in order to get at the real core (821).

The process of ridding oneself of the persona, unveiling layers of the onion and unmasking the distorted thinking that prevent a life of well-being is a practice I experience daily through writing and working with other sober alcoholics and addicts. The writing, in conjunction with the choice to live sober and working a 12-step program, are commitments I have made for the sake of my well-being. These commitments teach me how to live life fully and have a healthy attitude with myself and with others.

DAILY WRITING PRACTICE

“Good morning God, I move the pen and invite you in. Here this morning and I give you all blocks to you and all blocks to writing. I am a okay. I’m a common variety drunk and alcoholic addict and I’m a okay. What will we talk about today?”

This is a beginning to one of my letters to a Higher Power that I, for the sake of simplicity, call God. The letters do not all start out like this and each one is a little different depending on the day. This disease is one that centers in the mind. One of the tools that I use to manage my thinking is to hand write three pages of college-ruled paper with stream-of-conscious writing every morning and read it to a sponsor. This daily writing is not affiliated with, nor a requirement of 12-step programs. It is a tool I use that was adopted by a sponsor from Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way* “Morning Pages,” and a way I work the steps with a sponsor and sponsees.

Because I am not always aware of what thoughts or motives are driving my words and behaviors, the pages give me the space to write honestly about what is showing up that morning. As I read the pages aloud to another, I learn what unhealthy thoughts and actions are blocking me from well-being for that day. Like the Surrealists’ aim, my writing’s purpose is to open up what is in my subconscious.

This practice has required vulnerability, a courage, as I began revealing in the pages and sharing with another what I was unconsciously hiding and did not want to share. Through writing daily and listening to others’ writings I began to notice what I was afraid to reveal, had denied to myself, would otherwise have kept hidden inside, and had not wanted anyone to see. This process gives me freedom, not only from distorted thinking—from thinking I am alone, wrong or unique in what I think and how I behave. The process of sharing vulnerably has taken time. Due to the safety of the space, I have continued to learn how to be in honest, intimate relationships with others.

Before this practice misery, procrastination, rage, isolation, self-centered, entitlement, victim, and blame were a way of life for me. I was not open to new activities and succumbed to fears instead of facing and moving through them. I lived in a perpetual state of self-created anxiety. Making art was a practice that I abandoned for over a decade. It was not until I had developed my writing practice and worked with a sponsor for several years that I began to make art again.

What does writing have to do with the art I make and how are they related? Because I write, I have undergone a transformation, moving into a healthier place where I am peaceful, fun, and light-hearted. Because I expose unhealthy thinking and behaviors daily in the writing, I am able to share something optimistic with the artwork. As I have written and heard others' letters, I have learned to share honestly and openly about what life was like and what my life is like today. This honesty and openness about my experiences as well as wonder of new discoveries has migrated into the making. Although these may not be literally represented in the work, I am drawn to share a positive energy and environment with the possibility that it will connect with or speak positively to another.

Positive effects on mental and physical well-being have been evidenced in studies on people who participate in expressive writing. There are limited studies to be able to state concrete conclusive results and Stephen J Lapore, a professor of public health who focuses his work on the prevention, control and cancer survivorship, "suggests that expressive writing can improve regulation of emotion-related experiences, physiological responses, and behaviors, which in turn can enhance physical and mental health outcomes" (99). In his article, *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being*, Lapore explains that humans have three emotional responses, experiential, physiological, and behavioral, that can be experienced when exposed to situations or engaging in behaviors. He bases this theory on the Darwin and James's findings that emotions are behaviorally adaptive, and our physiological responses are triggered by situations that have been creating emotional responses in humans (Lapore, 100). Experiential states include our positive and negative experiences. It determines whether we fight or flee a situation. The central and autonomic nervous system, and the neuroendocrine system that influences arousal, define the physiological state. This state determines whether we conserve energy or expend energy. Our behavioral state of emotional response is present in our body, face, and verbal response. This state includes whether we take action, avoid, approach, involve others, withdraw from others, etc. (Lapore, 100).

One of the anomalies of the emotional response states is that each are in part separate from the other, although we may be experiencing all three. Lapore states an example of the person who says they

are not afraid of snakes and yet their physiological state exhibits signs of fear. Through his research, he also discovered that the physiological state is present in a variety of emotional states, whereas the emotional response, one's subjective experience, is not strongly connected to the present physiological response.

This statement reminds me of why I read what I write to a sponsor and why I do not do this work in isolation or with any random person. When I first started writing I was not capable of being able to discern between reality and unhealthy thinking or between what Jung would call reality and the persona. I work with someone who has years of experience being objective, living through sickness, and moving into a life of well-being. As stated earlier by Jung, we must rid ourselves of the persona. To do so successfully, we must be honest and give up the resistance to taking ownership of the persona that we are afraid to own. Admitting the thing that I do not like about myself, the thing that I judge as intolerable has been one of the hardest and most freeing actions I have ever taken. Working with a sponsor who could see what I could not see about myself and listening to others' honesty through their letters has been key to seeing the persona and blocks that I have not been able or willing to see within me. Hearing the honesty and the admission of the persona and blocks in others gave me the courage to see these within myself. She has been a support and teacher for my ability to see, name, and own the emotion that I am experiencing. This practice has over time brought me (and continues to bring me) into greater awareness of what I am actually experiencing. For example, I was completely unaware of how angry I was when I first started writing. I could not see the anger that lived in my body, on my face, in my tone, and in my existence. A sponsor could hear it in the words I wrote, the way I spoke, and how I acted. I would read a letter and she would say, "You are full of rage", and I would think, "Where did you get that from?"

It took time and repetition of hearing what she saw for me to begin to hear and see the anger in myself. A sponsor would say to me, "It doesn't matter that you can't see it, just give it up and asked to be filled anew." I followed her directions even though it did not make any sense to me at all. Giving up the blocks, the unhealthy thoughts and behaviors, such as anger, fear and anxiety, in order to live life fully is what I have practiced. Through writing daily letters, I have been learning awareness of these emotions

and behaviors and how they operate in my life. This awareness teaches me I have a choice and I have made decisions that move me into a healthier life.

This writing practice has given me the courage to face life as it unfolds with a willing attitude. This process became relevant in graduate school as life presented a new challenge in the form of making that was completely different from how I had worked before. As with the writing practice, this way of making required vulnerability. Drawing without editing, meant a loss of control that I had not yet experienced. I had been successful drawing what I see from observation and photographs. However, drawing from memory or from a vision without editing was not a practiced method. I was afraid of being seen in this place of not knowing and being judged by the quality, or lack thereof, of what was made. Up until this point, the only openness I had experienced was through reading letters with a sponsor and others who also practice the daily writing. This method of automatic drawing triggered uncertainties and judgments within me that I had not come to terms with. I was afraid to be seen by not only a professor, but people viewing the work in the undergraduate and graduate programs. As someone who had covered up pain and fear with alcohol and drugs, it was a new experience to be vulnerable, open, and share myself through the art I was making.

INTUITIVE MAKING

My first experience with automatic drawing began with a willingness to draw a vision of myself from a memory. I found myself reaching a point in the drawing where the conscious mind, the editor, wanted to take over. Just as I have experienced the editor in the writing practice when revealing a part of myself I fear will be judged or when I desire to protect the ego, I could hear the critical voice say, “your drawing does not look like what you had pictured in your mind...fix it.” Yet, in that same moment I also heard, “Don’t edit.” That moment, with those words, and enough intrigue, kept me from erasing the image to see where the drawing was going—where it wanted to go.

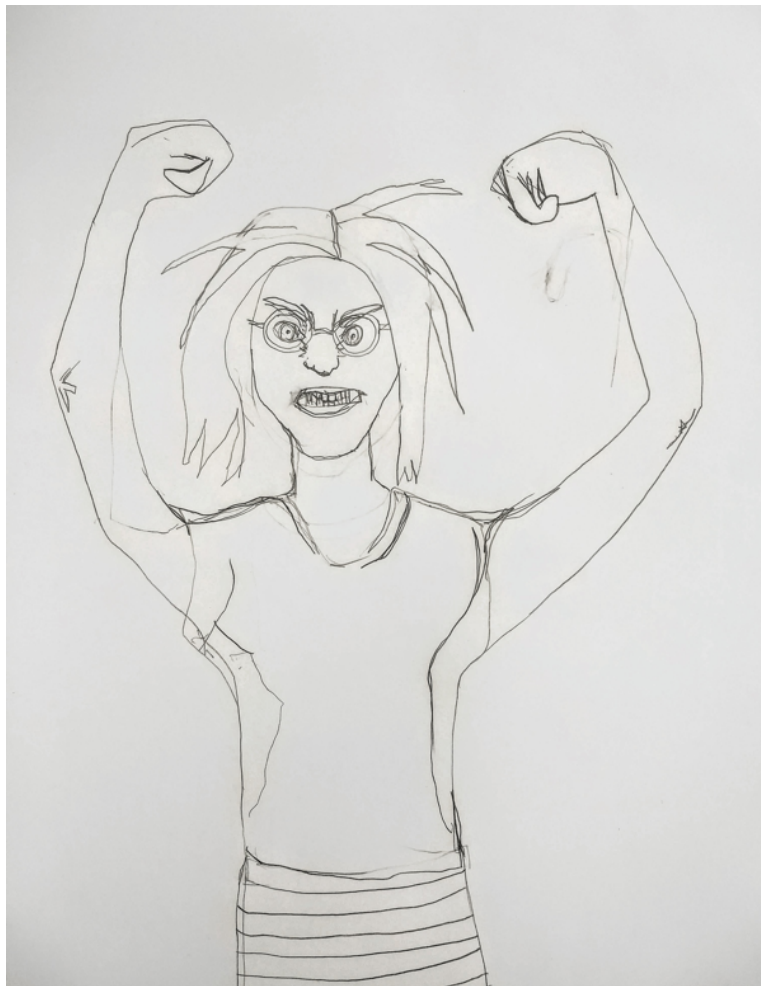


Figure1. Noelle Gunn. *Crazy Girl*. 2018. Graphite on Paper.

As I finished the drawing, I could see my portrait staring back at me and far from the vision I had intended (fig. 1). I immediately fell in love with the drawing. It was raw, honest, and untainted by my ego's hand. This result incited not only an intrigue with the new image, I also was able to see beauty in what was not controlled or created by the force of my hand. The drawing showed a wild, familiar girl within me waving her arms stark mad. I knew in that moment I had to make her in the third dimension-- to see her in the round, alive and off the page (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Noelle Gunn. *Crazy Girl*. 2018. Mud, Pine Straw, Yard Clippings, Glue, Toilet Paper, Masking Tape, Yarn, Ink, Discarded: Baby Doll Torso, Hemp Cord, Plastic Grocery Bag, Thread, Paper, Letters To God.

This experience sparked a new way of making for me. The best way for me to frame my intuitive process is to describe it as a listening, hearing, and acting, in varying orders. As I make, I pull from this inner voice that I hear. The listening requires a stillness within me, a being grounded in the calm, “[where] you try to make yourself blank so that you can just pay attention to what comes up” (Hamilton, *Art 21* 00:07:17-00:07:21). This is the voice from which I take direction and move into action. Hamilton states, “there is something about the rhythm of the hands being busy, and [your body falling] open to absorb and concentrate on what you’re listening to” that relates directly to my experience when I stitch, assemble materials, knit, sew, paint, even walk; it is the quiet that comes in the action and this opens me to listen (Hamilton, *OnBeing* 00:4:52-00:05:01). This practice of listening, hearing, and action is directly related to Ingold’s “meshwork” where growth and progression—creativity occurs as one follows a thread.

According to Ingold’s theory no piece is ever finished but a springboard for the next artwork or to be something else. It leads to a new thread to be followed. This image of Crazy Girl, as I call her, became the catalyst for what Ingold described, continuing from her image on to building her in the round which catapulted me to new making. During my first and second year of graduate school I was working through many different threads from the ‘meshwork’ that were all connecting and leading me to new threads to follow. I had “[joined] with the movement of the making...[feeling] forward...[in a] process of improvisation” (Ingold, 00:5:13-00:5:21). This process of improvisation led me to working with hand-made paper, second-hand textiles, fibers, and materials either headed to the trash or gotten from the trash. I made the shift from working two dimensionally to three dimensionally where I experimented with knitting, crochet, stitching, and netting. This process happened so fluidly that I did not even notice that I had shifted into working sculpturally. In my mind I was doing what was needed to solve the problem and explore the new visions.

Once taking the leap to make intuitively, I began to see clearly how the new way of working mirrored my writing practice. Both are stream-of-conscious, challenging me to open up to the unknown, and serving the purpose to move me into life, an engaged, joyful, imaginative life. Each require me to step

into uncertainty and live in the question, without knowing the answers. As I do this, I live in a world of discovery. The process of the writing and making teach me about me and life. They reward me with growth—and for me, participation, growth and learning is where being fully alive lives. As Nathalie Durjberg, Swedish artist based in Berlin, states, “Everything I do in art is a discovering of who I am. That is the search. That is the fascination” (Durjberg, 00:13:33-00:14:35). Solving these problems, following the improvisational threads, and engaging in self-discovery through making were all building toward the idea for the thesis.

GROUNDED: THE THESIS EXHIBITION

Although I had been practicing the principles of *Thinking through Making* throughout the time of my graduate experience, I initially reverted to the old way of thinking about making when faced with the realities of a deadline for the thesis exhibition. I made the decision to take an idea and make that idea. Due to the nature of *Thinking through Making* and the ‘not knowing’ that accompanies it, I was additionally challenged with how to explain what I would be making for the exhibition. At that point I did not have the words to say that I am *Thinking through Making*, allowing the work to evolve, and the artwork will reveal itself as I continue making.

The idea I heard was to make was an installation of a thunderstorm, inspired by a childhood family ritual of watching storms from our garage. This gallery environment would consist of layers of clouds hanging over a field of dirt that I would somehow build. I additionally saw floating paper houses hanging from the clouds over the field. As I began to make the clouds for the installation, I discovered that the picture I had in my mind for making them did not meet my visual expectation. The attempts to make them in the way I had planned repelled me. From that point there was a willingness to let the making of the clouds shift from the original vision and once again I opened up to having the process of making unfold. It was through this shift that I began to make multiple cloud forms using automatic drawing, through the assemblage and hand-stitching of fabrics, fibers, trash, natural debris, and experimental fragments of crochet, handmade paper, and knitting. After practice trials hanging them in the studio, I became aware that the clouds were no longer the clouds that I had originally intended. They were beginning to take on new identities that I did not fully comprehend.

Although I was intrigued with this discovery and excited to explore the “thread” that had shown up, I was also panicked with not knowing where the artwork was headed. As every life has its challenges, I was facing the upcoming birth of a child, with the installation deadline fast approaching. Even without the thought of a child newly being born into the family I was asking the question: How do I continue the process of *Thinking through Making*, with all the open-ended parts that I did not understand and complete the work in time for the exhibition?

Through the tool of daily writing, I was able to look at the options, alternatives, and fears standing in the way of me moving forward to meet the deadline. After about a week of seeing and giving up fear, panic, and procrastination through the writing, I made the decision to complete the thesis. With this decision I let go of the plan to make the thunderstorm vision. What came of this decision was a surprise, as it freed me to explore fully and move into making objects and decisions fluidly.

Due to Covid-19 and the closure of the gallery to the public, I and the graduate cohort were granted permission to work in the gallery three months before the exhibition. In January, I moved in-process and completed work from my studio into the gallery space where I continued to make and began to hang. While in this space I followed the intuitive voice that, after hanging the first cloud-form, said to hang the next on the wall. Once hanging it, I heard, “Hang two more with it.” After hanging them, their presence communicated confirmation of placement. This new discovery would not have been possible if I had remained fixed on the idea that the cloud-forms must be hung from the ceiling (plate 1).



Plate 1. Noelle Gunn. *The Three, Grounded*. 2020-2021. Discarded or Found: Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Paper, Drawings, Cotton, Cotton Seeds, Leaves, Sticks, and Wool.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

After seeing the three forms on the wall I immediately saw them as a unit, with their own identity, different from the original intention as well as from the cloud-form already hanging from the ceiling (plate 2). It was not until an unconscious comment come from my mouth that I heard their identity. This revelation further confirmed their unity and yet I was still unclear as to why I needed them to be in that place without any additional cloud-like forms on the wall. I only knew on an intuitive level these forms needed no competition and required space.



Plate 2. Noelle Gunn. Womb-like Form, *Grounded*. 2020. Discarded or Found: Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Handmade Paper, Crochet, and Wool. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

As the three forms had taken their place on the wall, I began to play with what other materials and fragments from prior intuitive experiments needed to be addressed and pulled into this installation space. Just as I had explored in the studio, the making of a space in the gallery took one step at a time, one idea at a time. I continued to follow the thread to make more cloud-like forms and while stitching them into their formation, I heard to hang the floating houses.

The floating houses, an original intention for the exhibition, were a thread that I had been following from my first year of graduate school (see plate 3). Started from an automatic drawing, the houses began to take form in the third dimension after experimentations with creating handmade paper during my second year. Each house was formed on a mold, a wooden house that I built out of discarded wood (see fig. 3 and 4). During this time of exploration, I infused different discarded and found materials in the paper pulp as I pulled sheets for house construction. As the time came closer to thesis, I knew they were to be a main element. The definitive reason for including them was not clear, except that I was working with a thread and following the intuitive vision.



Plate 3. Noelle Gunn. *Floating Houses, Grounded*, 2019-2021. Handmade Paper and Found Materials.
Photo Credit: Todd Houser



Figure 3. Noelle Gunn. *Wooden House Armatures*. 2019. Discarded Wood.



Figure 4. Noelle Gunn. *Paper Houses formed on Wooden House Armatures*. 2019. Handmade Paper, Discarded Paper, Fiber, and Grasses.

With the decision to hang the houses came the answer of how to suspend them. I wove a web of cording taut against the ceiling. From this action came the next direction, to hang the bramble bushes or root-like lightning forms from this web (plates 2 and 3). *Roots and Lightning*, the original title I gave the exhibition for the Thesis Approval Form deadline, was based on an intuition surrounding my family, memories, and our rituals of watching thunderstorms. After collecting these brambles from walks and hanging them in the studio, they found their way into the exhibition.



Plate 4. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *Lightning, Grounded*. 2021. Yard clippings.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 5. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Lightning, *Grounded*. Yard Clippings and Found Brambles. 2020-2021.
Photo Credit: Briana Earl

Each thread of the narrative I was building in the gallery became clearer as I worked and made. Never did I see the end picture of the exhibition in my mind. I only received a piece at a time when action was taken on what I heard to do next. In this flow, life was a part of the making: people visiting the gallery space, conversations, a baby born and coming with me to the gallery, being in a house newly bought and moved into, people dropping off materials to the gallery who knew I used trash and yard clippings in the work, invitations to homes to pull branches off property or collect materials. People began to pitch in with contributions and some of those gifts became a part of the exhibition.

It was not until after completing the exhibition that I discovered its title, *Grounded*. As I reflect on the entire process, I can now see that being grounded, rooted in peace and calm and a strength bigger than me, is what came through my hands into the work. I created an environment that to me is the epitome of a sanctuary and wonder—what keeps me healthy. Each part of the exhibition were manifestations of what grounds me, from childhood family rituals, to walks in nature and being outside, to loving relationships, and the daily letter writing— as the physical letters as well as scanned letters printed on fabric are present in the floating house forms. (plates 4 and 5). The houses that are in the sky, floating, with no bottom—open—were built on a solid foundation, literally on the wooden house forms placed firmly planted on the ground in the exhibition.



Plate 6. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Letters in Floating House, *Grounded*. 2020. Handmade Paper, Fabric and Discarded Fibers. Photo Credit: Todd Houser

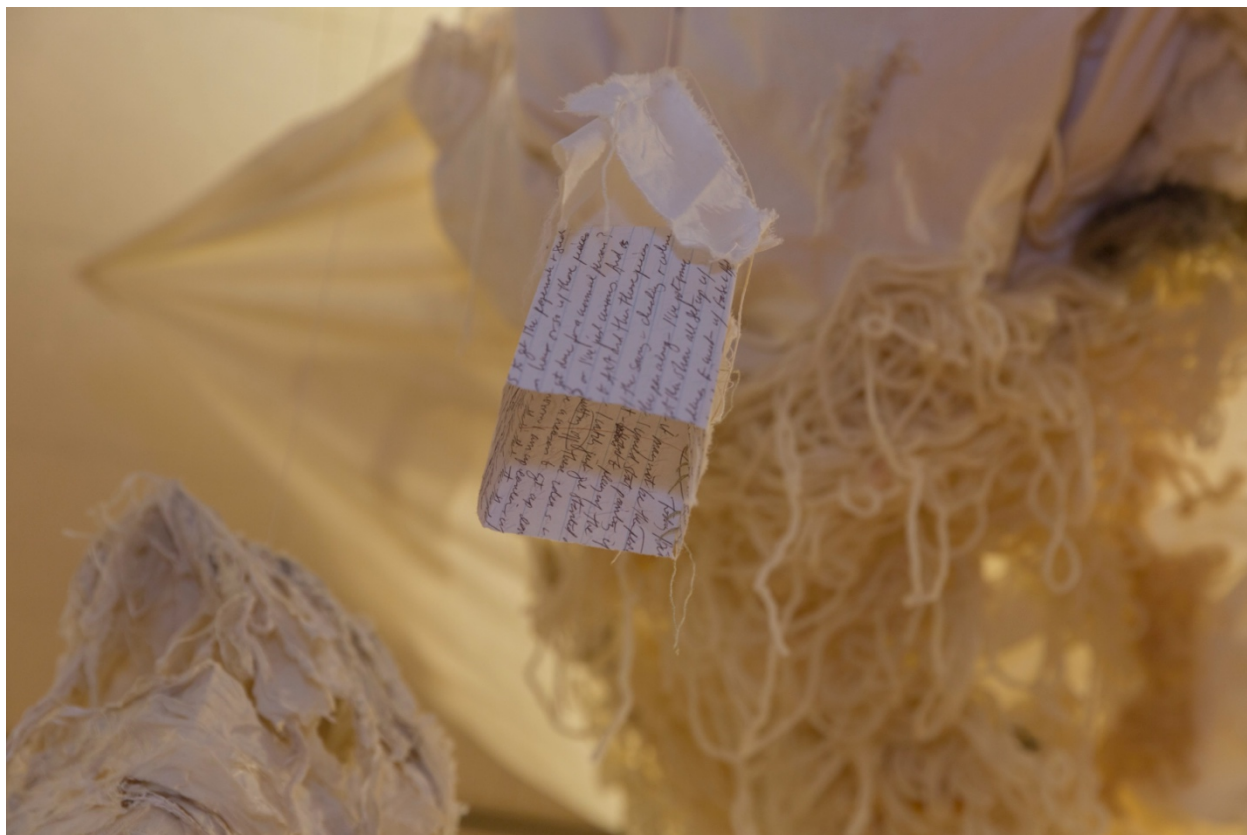


Plate 7. Noelle Gunn. Detail of a Letter as a Floating House, *Grounded*. 2020. Letter to God, Fabric and Discarded Fibers. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

There are parts of the exhibition that I only partially understand. These are the threads that are still waiting to be picked up and followed for further discovery. There is a relationship that is happening, for example between the wooden house armatures, the floating houses that were built upon the armatures and the now walking houses. The wooden houses were not originally intended to be exhibited and as I spent time with them in the studio I began to notice and enjoy their quirky personality. While I finished constructing the large cloud-like forms, I brought them into the gallery and spent time with them in that space, allowing their place and story within the environment to unfold. In addition, the walking houses were birthed from spontaneous interactions in the gallery. Their legs made from golden rod and dog fennel stalks, had been picked up on a whim, without knowing why or if they would be used. I was attracted to the beauty of their line and repetitious pattern—the relationship I saw happening between them on the ground.

Clarity has come in layers regarding the cloud forms' identities after seeing and experiencing them hanging in the gallery. I could see that they were feminine. At first, I saw them as bigger than me, powerful, majestic, each with an undoubted appearance of the womb. They spoke to me of seeds and nests, and although their identity shifted, they continued to speak to me of clouds. I was continually pulled to the cloud-form that appeared pregnant. How is it that I made this form appear pregnant without this conscious thought? (see plate 8).

I was intrigued by her. She was in her place in the sky, quietly watching, as if she knew something I did not. Not in an arrogant way, in a loving, powerful, wise way. She was gentle and strong-- a mother, grandmother, the purity of woman, femineity, something otherworldly, a child-like innocence. She was celestial and angelic. The lighter, soft, ephemeral like textures and values emphasize these qualities. She was bride-like as well, a reflection of purity and simple beauty. This form signified the root of the feminine being.

The other womb-like form that particularly caught my attention was in the forefront of the exhibition. A form suspended intuitively without foreknowledge that when hung she would have wings spread in a welcoming and soaring position. With open arms, she invited me into the environment I had built (see plate 9).



Plate 8. Noelle Gunn. *Womb-like Form, Grounded*. 2020. Discarded or Found: Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Handmade Paper, Crochet, and Wool. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 9. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *Womb-like Form, Grounded*. 2020.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 10. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *Womb-like Form, Grounded*. 2020.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 11. Noelle Gunn. *Open Arms Form, Grounded*. 2021. Discarded or Found: Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Inked Paper, Childhood Book Pages, Handmade Crochet, Drawings, Leaves, Sticks, and Wool.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

Until now I was not aware of clouds being a common image in my making and solving of problems. Clouds, as mentioned, were initially one of the main elements of the exhibition, and they had also appeared in an earlier thread of discovery leading up to thesis. The transformation I see in the once cloud-forms into the feminine-womb-like forms draws an interesting parallel to a former image that included a dark cloud-like space that represented my biggest fear (fig. 5). The dark cloud-like space, originally intended to be an attic full of roaches, became the representation of fear that I approached suited up in full body armor to face from the ground below. At the time I was uncertain of why this cloud had appeared instead of the feared attic with roaches. I did not understand what the transformation meant.



Figure 5. Noelle Gunn. *Face Off: The Ventures of Roach Killer*. 2018. Watercolor, Graphite, Colored Pencil, Charcoal,

As I became aware of the overall softness of the hanging womb-like forms, I discovered these feminine forms were self-portraits. Each are soaring, moving forward on a journey, a path, while simultaneously representing specific moments of my life, with specific identities in time. The open positioning of the forms, the transparency and lightness of material, the feminine appearance and softness are all qualities that have been coming forth from within me that have been hidden or misplaced a long time. The fear, represented by the 'dark cloud' that loomed above the armored 'me' in the former image was faced as I have been allowing myself to be seen for who I am, as I am without the cover up or armor. The details, the makings of the womb-like forms are in the open for all to see (plate 9). There is a lightness present in color and in material, in contrast to the image that was dark and foreboding.

The floating houses in their light, heavenly, subtle presence surrounded specific womb-like forms that I see today as pivotal points of my journey (see plates 10, 11, and 12). They also hovered above and around those who traversed the exhibition. These houses are physical manifestations of those who have guided the way, shined love in my life and taught me how to share this love and guidance with others. The walking houses are the lights who walk amongst us. As they stand in support of the womb-like forms, others are moving forward, walking into the world (see plate 13). They represent those I meet who shine light and joy, and share with an honest, selfless attitude. They are a part of me, and I a part of them. These relationships have taught me the light within myself and inspired me to live life fully.



Plate 12. Detail of Open Arms Form, *Grounded*. 2021. Discarded or Found: Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Inked Paper, Childhood Book Pages, Handmade Crochet, Drawings, Leaves, Sticks, and Wool.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 13. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Houses Surrounding Womb-like Form, *Grounded*. 2021. Handmade Paper, Found Materials, Goldenrod and Dog Fennel Shafts, and Cotton Twine.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 14. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Houses Surrounding The Beginning Form, *Grounded*. 2021. The Beginning Form: Discarded or Found: Fabric, Paper, Jute, Yarn, Thread, Twine, Crochet, and Sticks. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 15. Noelle Gunn. Detail Walking Houses, *Grounded*. 2021. Handmade Paper, Found Materials, Goldenrod and Dog Fennel Shafts, and Cotton Twine. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

CONCLUSION

According to Tim Ingold's theory, *Thinking through Making* provides a healthier solution for being in and interacting with the world. He explains that by knowing from the inside where one is engaging in the materials and life around us in each moment, one will come to awareness and solutions as the process unfolds. This awareness leads to the next decision that continues to carry one forward, ultimately carrying forward life.

The way I approach making has entirely changed as I practiced automatism and Tim Ingold's theory *Thinking through Making*. Giving myself permission to play, let go of preconceived outcomes and results, and be present in the process, opened me up to learning and exploring what I never would have expected or otherwise encountered—in fact moved me to a place beyond what I had planned for myself. What I came to realize through the experience of making is the direct relation of the writing practice to the artistic work. Writing is what gave me the courage and willingness to take the leap into something new and unknown. Both practices now lead me to new awareness. This awareness builds a wider view in which I see myself and the world, giving me the ability to make conscious choices that today I make to move me into greater health for the benefit of me and the world around me. According to Joanna Fiduccia:

Surrealism gives us a way to think about the connections between individual creative freedom and collective liberation...Breaking down the boundaries between dreams and waking life, between cultures, and between each other, Surrealism remains an example of how reimagining ourselves can be the definitive step toward changing our world (00:09:42-00:09:48, 00:09:52-00:10:04).

The writing practice coupled with the accountability of working with a sponsor, as well as other alcoholics and addicts led to a total transformation in my life. Those who have gone before me, gave me a picture and a solution for a life reimagined, offering me the strength to choose a bigger, more beautiful life. Much like Jung's process of Individuation, as I do the work to unveil the persona and come to know my true self, I am granted the gift of to participate in individual creative freedom that maybe, just maybe will lend a hand toward the good of the whole.

The transformation that has come in my life, from a time of active addiction and alcoholism into sobriety and greater health, would not have been possible without the willingness to say yes to a new way of living and the loving relationships that have taught me the skills needed to be grounded. The environment made in the exhibition, through automatic drawing and *Thinking through Making*, demonstrates the transformation in the art that came from the willingness follow a thread, pay attention to what shows up in the moment, and take action without certain results. After making the work I was able to see a transformation that has been transpiring within me. What was internal, inside of me—that was not conscious, became external in the art, in the materials, color, and resulting construction and installation of objects made. The art changed on the outside and in time prompted the discovery of the shifts happening within me.

As I am leaving graduate school, I have threads awaiting to be followed, continued discoveries to be made and a confident, adventurous attitude moving with me. With the daily practice of writing and a willingness to say yes to new endeavors, I have adopted a way of making that aligns with and mirrors the writing and the principles that guide me in living life fully.

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IMAGES



Plate 16. Noelle Gunn. Front View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 17. Noelle Gunn. Front Left View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 18. Noelle Gunn. Front Right View, *Grounded Installation*. 2021.
Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 19. Back View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 20. Noelle Gunn. Left Back View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 21. Noelle Gunn. Back Right View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 22. Noelle Gunn. Middle Left View, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 23. *The Beauty Form, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 24. Noelle Gunn. Front Left View with Gateway and Wooden Houses, *Grounded*. 2021.
Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 25. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Gateway, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 26. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Gateway and Shadows, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 27. Noelle Gunn. *What Grows, Grounded*. 2019-2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 28. Noelle Gunn. *What Grows, Grounded*. 2019-2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 29. Noelle Gunn. *The Path and Beginnings, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 30. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Beginnings, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 31. Noelle Gunn. *Childhood, Grounded.* 2020-2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 32. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Childhood, *Grounded*. 2019-2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 33. Noelle Gunn. *The Three, Grounded*. 2020-2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 34. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Three, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 35. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Three, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 36. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Three, Grounded*. 2020. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

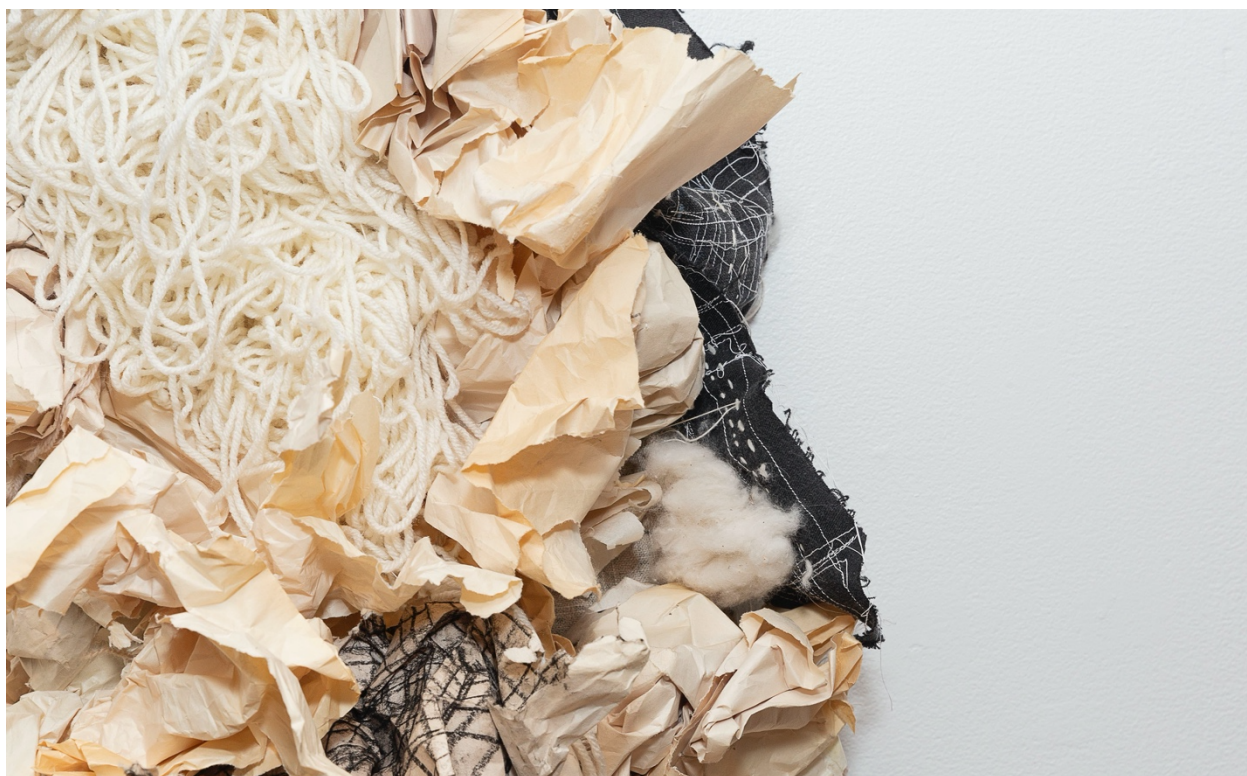


Plate 37. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Three, Grounded*. 2020. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 38. Noelle Gunn. Detail of *The Three, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 39. Noelle Gunn. Detail of The Three, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 40. Noelle Gunn. *Floating Houses, Grounded*. 2019-2021. Photo Credit: Todd Houser



Plate 41. Noelle Gunn. Detail, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Briana Earl



Plate 42. Noelle Gunn. Detail, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 43. Noelle Gunn. Detail of House, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 44. Noelle Gunn. Detail of House, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 45. Noelle Gunn. Detail of Floating House, *Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 46. Noelle Gunn. *Wooden Houses, Grounded*. 2019. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella



Plate 47. Noelle Gunn. *Dirt, Grounded*. 2021. Photo Credit: Morgan Zichettella

